

SIX DRAMAS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

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The title of this essay is, of course, taken from one of my favorite authors, Luigi Pirandello, Sei Personaggi in Cerca d'Autore. But with that the similarity is more or less exhausted. This is not a question of desperate people running around asking to be fulfilled by some author. Rather, this is a cry by a social scientist, specializing in the generalizing social sciences dealing with peace, development and the future, as far as possible in a global and holistic manner. Also a fairly faithful theater watcher, enjoying whatever little is left in London when the musicals are disregarded, enjoying Berlin and Paris, New York - and Nordic theater. Desperate, because I feel the intense drama of our present world is so incredibly poorly represented on the stage. I am thinking, of course, of the contemporary drama of world politics, and I know perfectly well that all the themes are touchy, emotional, with people strongly for or against something.

But then the world is and was always dramatic. Take any play by Ibsen: of course he is writing about politics, for instance about the politics of the loneliness of individuals in a bourgeois society breaking forth, on the basis of a peasant society and a Beamtenstaat. He is writing about the individual against the compact majority, about women in search of themselves, about the two key strands in the Norwegian loom of national character, the dreamer (Peer Gynt) and the stern, puritan, absolutist (Brand).

Good theater was always good representation of burningly hot politics. But, there was and is and should also be another dimension to it: the macro level. Society/history is reflected on the micro level, the level of individuals - but not only between persons, also within persons. At the macro level most people will tend to think in terms of good forces and bad, white parties and

black. Translated at the micro level as a fight between persons who are only good/white and those who are only bad/black it all becomes boring, childish, moralistic - like some biblical legend, a soap opera, a cop-and-robbers movie or a tale of socialist realism from the Stalin days. It smacks of propaganda - religious/ideological or commercial/political or any combination. For a drama we want the subtleties of the world reflected in the subtle interplay between subtle persons. Or, is this only the superstitions by people believing themselves to be sophisticated?

I leave that aside since I myself am neither able, nor do I want to get out of this kind of habit. I see contradictions, the dialectic of good and bad wherever I turn, in more or less subtle forms, and I want drama to have the same yin/yang composition. My problem, however, is that when I go to the theater I see the political problems of yesterday well represented, and not only last century (Ibsen). I see the 1930s in the marvellous presentation given by Bertolt Brecht in Berlin, both West and East. But, of course I do not find a play about the corruptibility of the SED functionaries<sup>s</sup> on the highly professional stages of East Berlin - for obvious reasons. But why should there not be a play about the Flick corruption scandals in West Berlin, that temple of democratic freedoms?

Probably for equally obvious reasons, only that the political control is exercised less by the police, more by the (Springer) press, the political parties themselves, by the whole normative pressure of that intensely politicized society. Of course there are political cabarets, street theaters and of course that shows some strength of the West. But I would like to be party to the contemporary world when I go to major stages, not to theater museums.

An example from my own country: Nordahl Grieg's Vår Åre og vår makt was a burning political play about shipowner exploitation of sailors for quick profit, also during wars. Also due to that

play this is no longer a key problem in Norway, and the play no longer causes the same emotions. Like Ibsen the play may be performed on May 17 - our national day, as a monument over the past.

Of course, nobody will accuse the management of most major theaters, be they run on a commercial (blue), subsidized (red), or mixed (pink, social democratic) basis of excessive courage, in general.

Whether paid by the public or the public sector or both theater directors have a natural disinclination to bite the hand or hands that feed them. But I have<sup>a</sup> strong feeling that not even the authors for key political dramas of our time exist, in other words that there

are few if any audacious manuscripts on the directors' desks awaiting, and not getting, the stamp of approval for the next season. One possible reason, alluded to in another paper: the experts, mainly social scientists, journalists, in some cases diplomat<sup>s</sup> who can sense these problems from more than a narrow national or class angle do not know how to write plays; those who have those particular<sup>artistic and</sup> artisanal skills know too little about the world in which they live, except as history, as documented, as past tense - like a Hochhut writing a fantastic play about a pope.

So, let me indicate my six themes, or dramas that I would like to see on stage so that they could become the property of more than a handful of specialists, and not be processed into the unrecognizable by some newspaper editorialists pressing his (party) political perspective on a complex, contradictory reality.

My six themes derive from a division of the world into four parts; the first world of rich, capitalist countries (headed by the USA), the second world of state/bureaucratic socialist countries (headed by the Soviet Union); the third world of essentially poor countries wanting to become like countries in the first and/or

the second, guided by the vision of a New International Economic Order; and then a fourth world of countries in East and Southeast Asia, headed by Japan, guided by a vision of becoming No. 1 in the world (ichi-ban). Much can be said about this division of the world; suffice it only to note that Japan is not listed among the Western countries (which, of course, it is not anyhow), that the mini-Japans and the ASEAN countries are not listed in the Third world being far too dynamic for that. The fourth world has its own characteristics, confucian and buddhist among other things.

With the world divided into four parts I get six pairs - these are my six dramas. Let me now try to indicate some of the raw material in these six global relations shouting loudly for some processing by an author with sufficient talent and personal experience. After all, that is what Ibsen had, and Grieg - and Hemingway and Orwell as well, for instance, only that the latter two chose other forms of presentation of their visions of reality.

To start: the relation between the first and second worlds, a relation basically of a nuclear suicide pact (to quote the US admiral who is so important in the peace movement, Gayler), with the hope that it is a bluff.

Take the people at the "dis armament negotiation" table. They are playing at least three games simultaneously. To the peoples of the world: we are serious, dedicated people trying to do something about a desperate problem, needing your help rather than your criticism. To the armament/disarmament establishment: only agreements that are mutual, balanced and verifiable are acceptable.

And then the basic rule of the game, to the US negotiator: US superiority is to be maintained! And to the Soviet negotiator: Soviet parity with the US is to be obtained/maintained! Clearly the rules are mutually incompatible. Show them, as they are, confused

and confusing, particularly the US one because his act is impossible to put together. Show them in meetings with the peace movement (the Soviet Union overaccepting, the US refusing to meet them as was the case in Geneva fall 1983) Show them with their superiors back home, possibly even pleading for change of instructions.

Show them with their own women and children asking the simplest question which they are unable to answer (but Daddy, when did this kind of approach ever lead to anything like peace in the past, why should it be more successful today?)

Or, more dramatically: in their bunkers, underground. Reveal their nakedness as human beings, sitting there with the power to incinerate millions, possibly billions of us. With their family above ground? Or under ground? With their rules (the buttons to push shall be so far apart that nobody can reach two buttons at the same time - but what about a pan-handle?) Or, the pattern of having people scrutiny each other for possible signs that they may be about to break down, that they are no longer "normal" (are the people who watch "normal"? What does the concept of normalcy mean, if anything, in a world of people sharing the idea of possibly, one day, eliminating millions with the use of the appropriate code? What does it mean that these people hardly ever meet anybody else but their own kind, never exposed really to the basic recipe of democracy, a reasoned debate, free from dominance by anybody?

The late Jørgen Vedel-Petersen who managed to keep debate and dissenting views so alive in the cultural section of even Denmark's Radio (I say 'even' not meaning that the Norwegian one is particularly better, they are both the official broadcasting voice of NATO client countries wrote a beautifully constructed play before he died. 1984. Midt i en førkrigstid. Heller død enn rød eller hvad. Det er om to familier som bor i hvert sitt hus på hver

sin side av muren i Berlin = dette konkrete symbol på galskapen. Sønnene begår politiske forbrytelser, hvilke spiller mindre rolle, mot hver sin form for Tysland, blir kastet i fengsel, bare for å oppdage at fengslene er forbundet med hverandre som de (også symbolske) deler de er av et gammel nazi-fengsel. Vedel-Petersen, toppjournalisten, med sterke kunstner-anlegg makter nettopp det som blir så få til del: å forene dyp innsikt med dramatisk utforming.

Fikk han det oppført? Ikke såvidt jeg vet, bare kort tid før han døde fortalte han meg om alle disse mennesker som foreleste for ham om verdien av l'art pour l'art, hvor kunst alt så framstår som monumenter over fortidens politiske problemer. Vel, kanskje noe kan skje etter at han forlot oss.

The relation between the first and the third worlds: a major theme for Graham Greene, a master, but again, his form of presentation is not the stage. The US is, by definition, the key actor, in a dialectic between control and intervention; if control fails, then intervention, when the costs are not too high, and the opportunity costs (meaning the costs if one does not intervene) are high. But controlling what, and how? Essentially terrorism, and by means of terrorism, supposedly from below, and from above, respectively. Who will be relieved by whose arrival on the scene? Is the intervention finally an excuse for torturers and terrorists to get out of each other's claws? Are they all each other's pretexts and, consequently, mutually indispensable? Are they all three different expressions of the same madness or of three different madneses? And what <sup>about</sup> that little question of that child quoted above, "when did this ever work?" I see the doubts creeping into each one of them as they prepare for the continuation of their violent pursuits, protected by hatred, short time perspectives backward and forward, or simply by stupidity which is an explanatory factor never to be

forgotten in human affairs although it is usually considered too uninteresting to merit much scientific or artistic attention.

The relation between the first and the fourth worlds is entirely different. Intense economic competition between the two, but particularly between the top countries, between the US and Japan.

Nobody has expressed it better than one of the major US political analysts, the satirist Art Buchwald. His column <sup>story</sup> starts right after the capitulation, with the US telling Japan they were no longer permitted to produce arms and the defeated admiral, the Japanese, asking, "what should we do instead". "Why don't you make automobiles?" is the answer, "here's a book with the instructions". MacArthur's <sup>says</sup> aide The story ends, as one can imagine, with the US ex-aide being sent back to Japan, 36 years later, walking into the luxurious offices of the ex-admiral/car producer giving him the message from the president of the United States: "He wants you to stop making so many damn Japanese cars".

- "But if we can't make cars, what else can we make?"
- "He wants you to start making arms".
- "But we don't know how to make arms".
- "The president told me to give you this".
- "What is it?"
- "A book of instructions"

Why does nobody pick up such fantastic material for the stage? US naiveté, ignorance, and also benevolence, Japanese long-term planning horizon combined with a considerably deeper understanding of the other party than he has of Japan, so many Japanese being bicultural, even bilingual at the same time as almost no Westerners have any depth to their knowledge about Japan, leaving alone ability to speak the language. But this is only one aspect of Japanese



strength, another being the ability not to show their strength.

Buchwald has picked up even this point, letting the admiral ask:

"How can a poor defeated country like Japan hope to compete with your wonderful cars?" In short, the art of winning without letting the other party know. Of course, US naiveté, fed by a mixture of generosity and ignorance, is another condition for this to work - till one day they discover themselves outmaneuvered even in arms sales by Japan.

The relation between the second and the third worlds has none of this subtlety. To me the high point of drama is when the Soviet commissar, maybe the local ambassador, comes to the new government in the country recently liberated from the shackles of (neo-) colonialism with an enormous input of that key Soviet export product, the Kalashnikov gun, and is exacting a price, in political currency: ministers in the government (particularly the ministry of the interior, the police, maybe the defense ministry. How many ministries

for how many thousands of guns? And the answers are exercises in evasiveness. The bill is never fully paid - but why not? CIA at work? Latent anti-communism? Or, simply the old thing, so well expressed in German, "Der Moor hat seine Tätigkeit getan, der Moor kann gehen", only with the Russian in the place of the "moor"? Difficult to tell, maybe the uncertainty of the nature of the game is a major part of the game. But think of the Soviet commissar with his marxist thought figures combined with his own personal interest in working for what he is told by his superiors is the Soviet national interest. The Africans should be grateful, having been brought from one stage in nothing less than History one, even two notches higher up! And yet they continue laughing, sometimes drinking, always frivolous about the whole enterprise. Where is the respect for the machinery of history, not to mention for that chief engineer, the founder of the Soviet state himself?

The relation between the second and the fourth worlds is again quite different from the others: there is almost no relation at all. Not much happens between the Soviet Union on the one hand and Japan or China and the smaller Japans on the other. But what a drama between the Soviet Union and China! I shall never forget my own experience in Moscow in 1966, giving some lectures at the Academy of Sciences and then asking my hosts, "please, tell me, what is this cultural revolution in China about". The answer was very clear:

- "You see, professor Galtung, it is a very complex relation. China was like a little child, our task was to guide that little yellow child forwards, to the revolution. That child has now attained puberty. And, believe me, that is a very difficult age. The best thing parents can do is to keep in the background, not interfere".

Seven years later I had the occasion to tell this story to a Chinese audience, in China. They did not laugh, they just found it outrageous. China, a little child! Having the highest culture when the forebears of the Russians of today were exactly that - fore-bears, at most running around in bearskin! Imposing on history a view of which country is more advanced so that they themselves can get into a first class position as "socialist society" they would never manage without that intellectual trick! And then, it is not even socialist, it is just "revisionist" (What they say today about that point I do not know).

What a material! It may be objected that few people in the West will understand the subtleties of this relation between China and the "North Barbarians". But who said we could not stretch ourselves and try to learn a little also when going to the theater?

The relation between the third and the fourth worlds is simpler, particularly FOR Westerners: It is the story of the West gradually being replaced by the Japanese as the key suppliers of industrial

goods, cars, electronics, watches, what not. This relation may be studied at many points, I would like to see it through the eyes of a South American marxist, working in the foreign trade ministry of his country, convinced of the necessity to find a substitute for yankee imperialism. He receives the Japanese trade delegations, also feeling that they represent a people that - rightly so - was able to find a position in the sun in a world dominated by the Western powers, in a sense the first Third world country to make it! He may know how good they are at negotiating, as when they landed an agreement with the US (spring 1968) about the liberalization of the import of citrus fruits, the only exceptions being lemons, oranges and grapefruits (leaving the small limes and the giant pomelos - -). He proceeds to the negotiations in the name of the brotherhood of Third world countries, also against yankee imperialism, till he discovers that the Japanese negotiators are negotiating in shifts, four of them resting and discussing while the next shift of four are negotiating (but then they all look alike, including the way they dress). He decides something strange is going on, but there he is wrong: what is going on is only a level of dedication, deep study, ~~and~~ and hard work unknown in most of the world (and particularly in South America).

So, there we are. Six dramas, in search of an author. Or, maybe only one drama? Maybe, for there is only one world -- a giant rotating stage in the Piscator tradition with these four world well represented, relating to each other through revolving doors, enacting these games - for instance as indicated here. And with some people here and there; after all, it all concerns us doesn't it? A peace movement, ~~and~~ fighting for survival; a human rights movement fighting for freedom; a revolutionary movement fighting <sup>for</sup> a minimum of material well-being; green movements fighting for all three at the same time, particularly the women.

The challenge is there. Authors, please pick it up!

Leseren vil finne en innledning til dette tema i Johan Galtung,  
"Var befinner seg teatern i vår tids drama?", entré, nr 1 1983, ss.  
17-24. Forøvrig anbefales Erwin Piscator! - for eksempel  
Das Politische Theater, rororo 1963, 1979 - både som teaterteori og som  
samtidshistorie.